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AP-NORC poll: Americans largely back Biden's virus response

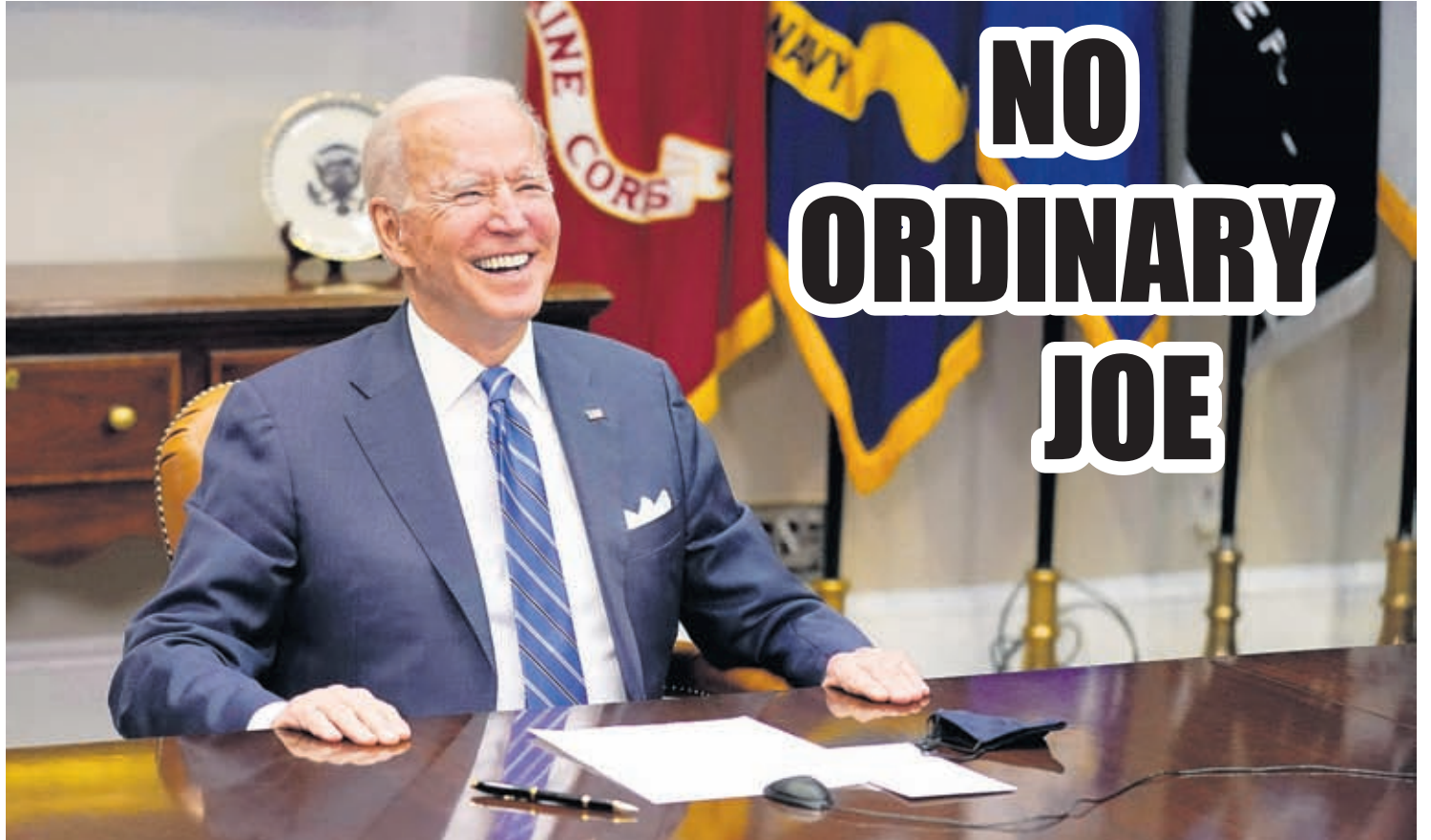
By JULIE PACE and
EMILY SWANSON

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden is enjoying an early presidential honeymoon, with 60% of Americans approving of his job performance thus far and even more backing his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

At a moment of deep political polarization in America, support for Biden's pandemic response extends across party lines.

Continued on Page 2



President Joe Biden congratulates NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory Mars 2020 Perseverance team for successfully landing on Mars during a virtual call in the Roosevelt Room at the White House, Thursday, March 4, 2021.

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AP-NORC poll: Americans largely back Biden's virus response

Continued from Front

Overall, 70% of Americans back the Democratic president's handling of the virus response, including 44% of Republicans.

Still, Biden faces more skepticism from Americans on the economy, which has been battered by the pandemic. Fifty-five percent of Americans approve of Biden's approach to the economy thus far, and 63% say the U.S. economy is in poor shape, the AP-NORC survey shows. Republicans are also less likely to back Biden on the economy than they are on the pandemic, with just 17% supporting his fiscal stewardship.

Less than two months into his presidency, Biden has made the pandemic his central focus, urging Americans to follow stringent social distancing and mask guidelines and vowing to speed up distribution of critical vaccines. He's also argued that until the spread of the virus is under control, the economy won't fully recover.

To address financial shortfalls in the meantime, he's asking Congress to pass a \$1.9 trillion pandemic res-



President Joe Biden congratulates NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory Mars 2020 Perseverance team for successfully landing on Mars during a virtual call in the Roosevelt Room at the White House, Thursday, March 4, 2021.

Associated Press

cue plan that would provide direct payments to millions of Americans and surge funds into state and local governments.

The measure has already passed the House. But Biden is having to make compromises to keep all Democratic senators in support of the measure, including agreeing this week to narrow eligibility for \$1,400 stimulus checks. In a concession to moderate Democratic senators, Biden agreed that individuals making more than \$80,000 annually and

couples making more than \$160,000 won't receive any benefits. Biden's original proposal extended the stimulus funds to Americans with higher annual wages. The administration estimates that 158.5 million households will still receive checks under the Senate compromise.

The prospect of a pandemic relief bill is welcome news to John Villegas, 58, an Illinois Democrat who supports Biden's handling of both the virus response and the economy.

"With the closure of so

many businesses, there are a lot of people suffering," said Villegas, who called Biden's approach a "180 degree shift" from his predecessor, Donald Trump.

Trump argued that the U.S. economy couldn't afford the hit that came from enacting restrictions on business and travel. The worst fears of economists were averted as Republican-led states followed Trump's lead and resisted restrictions, but COVID-19 cases skyrocketed. More than 520,000 people have died in the United States from the virus over the past year. Despite their differing approaches to managing the economy during the pandemic, Biden's approval ratings on the economy are similar to Trump's, whose handling of the economy since the virus took hold was consistently backed by about half of Americans. The key difference: That level of support made the economy Trump's strongest issue, while it's a relative weakness for Biden compared with Americans' views of his handling of the pandemic and other issues. In a reflection of the partisanship that continues to

rage in the U.S., many Americans' views of the economy have flipped since the new president was inaugurated. In December, 67% of Republicans and just 15% of Democrats described the economy as good. Now, 35% of Republicans and 41% of Democrats describe the economy positively. There's been little change in overall growth or unemployment over that time.

Biden's handling of the pandemic may well determine the course of his presidency and the political capital he has to pursue significant legislation on other matters. Democrats are working urgently to tee up bills addressing infrastructure investment, policing reforms and voting rights. Biden has also vowed to tackle climate change and build on the sprawling health insurance measure signed into law when he served as Barack Obama's vice president.

His promises of action have garnered him solid approval ratings on some of those fronts. For example, about 6 in 10 Americans say they approve of Biden's handling of health care and race relations. □



Former President Donald Trump speaks at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), Sunday, Feb. 28, 2021, in Orlando, Fla.

Associated Press

Trump, RNC clash over using his name in fundraising

By JILL COLVIN

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Republican National Committee is defending its right to use former President Donald Trump's name in fundraising appeals after he demanded they put an end to the practice.

In a Monday letter to Trump attorney Alex Cannon, RNC chief counsel J. Justin Riemer said the

committee "has every right to refer to public figures as it engages in core, First Amendment-protected political speech" and said "it will continue to do so in pursuit of these common goals."

But he maintained that Trump had also "reaffirmed" to the chair of the RNC, Ronna McDaniel, over the weekend "that he approves of the RNC's

current use of his name in fundraising and other materials, including for our upcoming donor retreat event at Palm Beach at which we look forward to him participating."

Trump responded to the letter with a statement that put that agreement in doubt.

"No more money for RINOS," or Republican in name only, he stated. □

Jimmy Carter says he's sad, angry over Georgia voting bills

By BILL BARROW

The Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Former President Jimmy Carter declared his opposition Tuesday to a slate of restrictive voting proposals moving through his native Georgia's General Assembly, saying he is "disheartened, saddened and angry" over moves to "turn back the clock" on ballot access after Democratic successes in 2020.

Carter, a Democrat, said in a long statement that the Republican-backed proposals, which would end no-excuse absentee voting, "appear to be rooted in partisan interests, not the interests of all Georgia voters." The GOP push comes after Georgia favored President Joe Biden in November and elected two new U.S. senators in January, giving Democrats control of the U.S. Senate and cementing Georgia as a clear battleground.

Carter, 96, alluded to false assertions by former President Donald Trump, saying the proposed restrictions "are reactions to allegations of fraud for which no evidence was produced — allegations that were, in fact, refuted through various audits, recounts, and other measures."

Georgia's Republican legislative leaders insist their measures are necessary to restore public confidence



In this Nov. 3, 2019, file photo, former President Jimmy Carter teaches Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga.

in the election, a position Carter dismissed.

"As our state legislators seek to turn back the clock through legislation that will restrict access to voting for many Georgians, I am disheartened, saddened, and angry," Carter wrote.

Carter's statement came a day after the Georgia Senate passed a sweeping bill that would sharply limit who could cast absentee ballots. More than 1 million voters — or more than a fifth of the November electorate — used the no-excuse absentee ballot process in the general election.

That slice of the electorate

tilted solidly to Biden but still included many Republican voters. Biden won Georgia's 16 electoral votes by about 12,000 votes out of 5 million cast.

The Senate measure passed on a party line vote with the minimum number required to clear the chamber. With scores of election bills pending, the Assembly almost certainly will have to settle the matter with a conference committee of representatives and senators who will be tasked with crafting a compromise bill to present both chambers. Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican, and his aides have

been involved in some discussions with legislative leaders, but the governor has largely deferred publicly on the details. He has said he wants to add a voter identification requirement to absentee voting, replacing the existing signature match requirement used to verify voters' identities.

Georgia is among the dozens of states where Republican lawmakers are pushing hundreds of bills that would make it harder to cast ballots than it was in 2020. Many states expanded voting options in 2020 because of the coronavi-

rus pandemic, but many of the GOP-backed measures go beyond those changes to curtail longstanding voting practices. For example, in Georgia, no-excuse absentee voting was enacted under a 2005 law adopted by a Republican-controlled Assembly. Another proposal would roll back Georgia's automatic voter registration law, forcing new voters to affirmatively opt in to registering to vote when they secure a driver license rather than having the option to opt out of registering. Carter focused his criticisms mostly squarely on the proposal to roll back absentee voting. He pushed back at some advocates of the legislation who have cited an elections security report he co-authored in 2005 with former Secretary of State James Baker, a Republican.

"While our report noted a few good and bad examples of vote-by-mail practices, its main recommendation was that further study of voting by mail was needed," Carter wrote. But "in the 16 years since the report's release," he continued, "vote-by-mail practices have progressed significantly as new technologies have been developed. In light of these advances, I believe that voting by mail can be conducted in a manner that ensures election integrity." □

Associated Press

High court won't hear Trump immigration case after all

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court won't weigh in on the legality of a controversial Trump administration immigration policy after an agreement by the Biden administration and states and groups challenging it. The agreement comes amid the Biden administration's reconsideration of the so-called public charge rule. It's just the latest outgrowth of the Biden administration's effort to undo Trump administration immigration policies. The new administration recently dismissed high court appeals over

former President Donald Trump's effort to deny funding to so-called sanctuary communities.

The justices, at the administration's request, also put off cases they had agreed to hear over the funding of portions of the wall along the border with Mexico and the policy of forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for their hearings. The high court had in late February agreed to hear a Trump administration appeal of a lower court ruling against the public charge rule. The policy allows the denial of per-

manent residency status to immigrants because of their use of food stamps, Medicaid, housing vouchers or other public benefits. The justices had agreed to hear the case even as President Joe Biden called for a "top-to-bottom" review of the rule.

On Tuesday, however, the Biden administration withdrew the appeal, saying all parties involved agreed to dismiss the case.

The immigrant groups that had been challenging the policy said that clears "the way at last for this unlawful rule to no longer



This Nov. 4, 2020 file photo shows the Supreme Court in Washington.

Associated Press

be enforced." Previously, the Supreme Court had divided 5-4 over allowing the policy to take effect while the legal challenge

continued. The legal challenge involved New York, Connecticut, Vermont, New York City and several organizations. □

Hawaii lawmakers considering nation's highest income tax

By **AUDREY McAVOY**

Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Hawaii is considering overtaking California as the state with the highest income tax rate in the nation, under legislation slated for a vote this week.

The Hawaii Senate was expected to vote Tuesday on legislation that would impose a 16% tax on individuals earning more than \$200,000 a year, which would beat out California's 13.3% on those earning more than \$1 million.

Hawaii's proposed new rate would also outstrip the largest combined local and state tax rate in the nation, paid by the highest income earners in New York City, which is currently 12.7%.

Hawaii has suffered a sharp decline in tax revenue as tourism has plummeted during the coronavirus pandemic, prompting lawmakers to search for new sources of income.

The bill includes hikes to the capital gains tax, corporate tax and taxes on high-end real estate sales. The Senate Ways and Means Committee unanimously passed the measure last week.

Sen. Donovan Dela Cruz, the committee's chairperson, said Hawaii has a budget deficit and the governor has warned he may have to furlough government workers. Dela Cruz said the state has deferred payments to funds for employee pensions and other



This March 1, 2019 file photo shows the Hawaii State Capitol in Honolulu.

retiree benefits to keep government running.

"We are in a dire situation and we are depending on our highest earners and those who are purchasing luxury homes to help us with this situation so that we can ensure that critical services go uninterrupted," said Dela Cruz, a Democrat.

The bill's prospects in the House were uncertain. House lawmakers have passed their own legislation raising the capital gains tax. They are expected to vote Tuesday on allowing counties to impose a surcharge on the state's hotel tax.

The state's top income tax bracket is currently taxed 11%, where it has been

since 2018. The 16% rate would expire after 2027 under the legislation.

Dale Arthur Head, a retired Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard worker who lives on Oahu, submitted written testimony saying many people have lost their jobs during the pandemic and those who have been blessed with more can afford "this modest increase." Taxes on the wealthy have been declining for decades while social programs have been cut, he said.

"It's not fair to people towards the bottom," Head said in an interview.

Beth Giesting, the director of the Hawaii Budget and Policy Center, submitted

written testimony saying various deductions, exemptions and tax credits mean that Hawaii's millionaires currently pay an effective tax rate of just 6.8%. The bill would increase the amount actually paid by those with high incomes, she said.

Jared Walczak, the vice president for state projects at the Washington, D.C.-based Tax Foundation, an independent tax policy nonprofit, said 95% of businesses around the country file taxes in this category and not in the corporate tax category.

They're called "pass-through" businesses because their income flows

through to the income tax returns of their owners. Such businesses — for example partnerships, sole proprietorships and limited liability companies — employ 40% of the nation's workers, Walczak said.

Hawaii businesses already have to pay an unusual levy called a general excise tax. It's similar to a sales tax in that it's imposed at the point of retail sale, but is also much broader — it taxes all business activity including wholesale and manufacturing.

The highest income tax rate in the nation, combined with this general excise tax, would be a "significant double blow" for Hawaii businesses, Walczak said.

"Hawaii leans heavily on the fact that it's Hawaii: people want to live in Hawaii, they want to vacation in Hawaii. You can get away with higher taxes because of that. It's not unlimited, however. And some individuals and businesses will really struggle under rising taxes cutting very much into their margins," he said. Brad Nicolai, the president of JN Group, which has 26 automobile and motorcycle franchises across Hawaii, said companies were just emerging from the pandemic and slowly trying to bring back employees. Labor is often the highest variable cost for Hawaii companies and some businesses will have to consider reducing their headcount if the tax hike goes into effect, he said. □

Associated Press

Arkansas governor signs near-total abortion ban into law



In this Jan. 13, 2020, file photo, Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson speaks to reporters in Little Rock, Ark.

Associated Press

Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson on Tuesday signed into law legislation banning nearly all abortions in the state, a sweeping measure that supporters hope will force the U.S. Supreme Court to revisit its landmark Roe v. Wade decision but opponents vow to block before it takes effect later this year. The Republican governor had expressed reservations about the bill, which only allows the pro-

cedure to save the life of the mother and does not provide exceptions for those impregnated by rape or incest. Arkansas is one of at least 14 states where legislators have proposed outright abortion bans this year. Hutchinson said he was signing the bill because of its "overwhelming legislative support and my sincere and long-held pro-life convictions." The bans were pushed by Republicans who want to force the U.S. Supreme Court to

revisit its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion nationwide. Conservatives believe the court is more open to striking down the decision following former President Donald Trump's three appointments to the court. Hutchinson has signed several major abortion restrictions into law since taking office in 2015, but he had voiced concerns that this bill directly challenges Roe and about the lack of rape and incest exceptions. □

Kerry in Brussels to relaunch U.S.-E.U. cooperation on climate

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN

Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — U.S. special envoy for climate John Kerry traveled to Brussels on Tuesday to relaunch trans-Atlantic cooperation with European officials in the wake of President Joe Biden's decision to rejoin the global effort to curb climate change.

Like EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Biden has said that fighting global warming is among his highest priorities. Biden had the United States rejoin the Paris climate accord in the first hours of his presidency, undoing the U.S. withdrawal ordered by predecessor Donald Trump.

Kerry was welcomed by the EU Commission vice-president in charge of climate action, Frans Timmermans, for discussions focusing on the next U.N. climate summit, taking place in Glasgow in November. He also held talks with von der Leyen and other EU officials during a weekly commission meeting on trans-Atlantic climate action.

Kerry insisted the partnership should "even be stronger now."

"We face an extraordinary



United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry speaks with the media prior to a meeting at EU headquarters in Brussels, Tuesday, March 9, 2021.

Associated Press

crisis, because the science is screaming at us, the evidence grows by the year," said Kerry, a former U.S. Secretary of State. "Last year, again, hottest year in history. ... So this is a crisis, the climate crisis. But it's also a moment of the greatest opportunity that we've had since perhaps the industrial revolution."

The 2015 Paris climate

change accord commits countries to put forward plans for reducing their emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, which is released from burning fossil fuels. European Union leaders reached a hard-fought deal in December to cut the bloc's net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared with 1990

levels.

The EU wants to be a leader in the fight against global warming and has pledged to reach climate neutrality by mid-century as part of its European Green Deal action plan. The Biden administration has yet to announce a new national 2030 target for cutting U.S. fossil fuel emissions.

"We have no better part-

ners than our friends here in Europe and the EU, it is important for us to align ourselves now, which is what we will discuss today, because no one country can resolve this crisis," Kerry said. "It will take every country."

Experts say any international efforts to keep global warming well below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) — or ideally 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees F) as agreed in the Paris accord — would struggle without the contribution of U.S., the world's second-biggest carbon emitter after China. Scientists say time is running out to reach that goal because the world has already warmed 1.2 degrees C (2.2 degrees F) since pre-industrial times.

"Paris does not alone get the job done," Kerry said. "The scientists tell us: This decade, 2020 to 2030, must be the decade of action." In addition to the U.N. climate summit in November, Kerry planned to discuss preparations for a U.S.-hosted climate leaders summit on April 22-23. Kerry was also set to meet with the bloc's top diplomat, Josep Borrell. □

UAE minister: U.S. sanctions on Syria challenge rapprochement

By ISABEL DEBRE

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Sweeping U.S. sanctions against the government of Syrian President

Bashar Assad undermine regional rapprochement efforts that could help settle the Syrian conflict, the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates said

on Tuesday.

In a joint press conference with his Russian counterpart in Abu Dhabi, Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan pushed for "joint action with Syria," saying that the American economic pressure campaign "as it is today makes the matter difficult."

He further pushed for the reinstatement of war-torn Syria in the 22-member Arab League and noted the government and private sector "could play a role" in returning Syria "to normal" after years of ruinous war.

Sheikh Abdullah's remarks underscore shifting regional dynamics as the 10-year anniversary of Syria's civil war looms next week. The

United Arab Emirates had supported the Syrian opposition during the early years of the war.

But as the Syrian army recaptured most of the territory from the opposition, the UAE and other Arab countries made openings toward Assad's government. In 2018, the UAE reopened its embassy in Damascus, for the first time since the start of an organized Arab diplomatic boycott in 2011.

Syria near-complete isolation has increased since the Trump administration in 2019 enacted legislation known as the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. The sanctions, which U.S. officials said aimed to hold "accountable the Assad regime for atrocities it has

committed against its own people," target Assad, his close circle of associates and family, senior security officials and troops as well as the Central Bank and any institutions believed to have played a role in the violence in the war in Syria. While Assad may have won the military war against his opponents with the help of backers Russia and Iran, he faces an even bigger challenge of governing while more than 80% of his people live in poverty. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov did not elaborate on the Syrian conflict at the press conference beyond saying that Russia "supports a political settlement" there, as well as in war-scarred Libya and Yemen. □



In this June 9, 2019 file photo, United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan listens during a news conference in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Associated Press

Split Cyprus defends razor wire to halt migrant crossovers

By **MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS**
Associated Press

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) —

The government of ethnically split Cyprus came under fire on Tuesday over a decision to lay razor wire along a section of a U.N. controlled buffer zone.

It says the move is needed to stem migrant inflows from the island's break-away north, but critics say the plan is "ineffective" and only feeds the fear that partition will be cemented, amid a renewed push to resume dormant peace talks.

Crews began laying the razor wire on the southern side of the buffer zone some 30 kilometers (19 miles) west of the capital, Nicosia, earlier this week. Critics, including the communist-rooted opposition party AKEL, said the move only leaves "huge question marks since it implies the delineation of borders and entrenching our homeland's division."

Farmers authorized to cultivate land inside the buffer zone initially voiced some concern over access to their plots, but the government said it would act to ease access.

Cyprus was split along ethnic lines in 1974 when Turkey invaded in the wake



Two men cycle along a row of razor wire along the southern side of a U.N buffer zone that cuts across the ethnically divided Cyprus, during sunset near village of Astromeritis, Tuesday, March 9, 2021.

Associated Press

of a coup by supporters of union with Greece. Turkish Cypriots in the island's northern third declared independence nearly a decade later, but only Turkey recognizes it. Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004, but only the southern part, where the internationally recognized government is seated, enjoys full benefits. Cypriot government officials say the country has the highest per-capita

number of asylum applications in the European Union. Most of those asylum-seekers cross a porous buffer zone after making their way to the north, often by commercial flights. AKEL spokesman Stefanos Stefanou acknowledged Cyprus is having to deal with large migrant inflows but insisted that "methods implying borders between states" isn't the way.

"Nowhere in the world has

the migration issue been solved by erecting walls, fences or barbed wire," said Stefanou. "These are (former U.S. President Donald) Trump's ideas which this government is obviously copying." Other opposition parties chimed in to say the move was very badly timed since it gives fodder to the current Turkish Cypriot leadership and its patron Turkey which want to forgo an agreed-

upon federal framework to reunify Cyprus and strike a deal based on two equal states. Peace group Unite Cyprus Now tweeted that it expected authorities to "spend as much effort on reducing barriers as they do on building them."

The government defended the move, saying that laying the razor wire is fully in line with European Union regulations governing movement across the buffer zone and that both the EU, U.N. and local authorities had been briefed beforehand. Government spokesman Kyriakos Koushos said no "political or other message" could be derived from the move other than to protect public safety and to obstruct "unchecked migrant inflows that Turkey feeds by design, through our occupied areas." Cypriot government authorities have long accused Ankara of actively encouraging migrants to apply for asylum in the south in order to "change the island's demographic character." Koushos said contact between Greek and Turkish Cypriots isn't impeded since people from either side of the divide cross along nine designated crossing points. □

Belgian police hit organized crime with hundreds of raids

By **SAMUEL PETREQUIN and MIKE CORDER**

BRUSSELS (AP) — Belgian police made 48 arrests Tuesday during an operation of unprecedented scale targeting organized crime, after investigators cracked an encrypted communications network popular with criminals, prosecutors said.

About 200 searches mobilizing more than 1,500 police officers including special units were carried out simultaneously throughout the country of 11.5 million people, the federal prosecutors' office said. Police seized 1.2 million euros (\$1.4 million) in cash, alongside firearms, jewelry, diamonds, police uniforms and luxury cars.

Meanwhile, Dutch police and prosecutors said in a statement that they arrested 30 suspects Tuesday throughout the country and searched 75 homes and offices.

Belgian prosecutors said investigators cracked the

encrypted messaging service Sky ECC and intercepted a billion messages during their two-year investigation that also helped seize more than 17 tons of cocaine.

According to the investigation, there are about

171,000 phones equipped with the Sky ECC service across the world.

Searches started at around 5 a.m. and mainly took place in the region of Antwerp. There were no major incidents, police said, adding that the operation dismantled several international organizations specialized in drug trafficking.

With thousands of shipping containers reaching Antwerp every day, the Belgian port city is one of Europe's main entry ports for cocaine.

Trafficking in the city has led to a surge of violence recently, with gun battles and grenade attacks taking place.

Last year, authorities in

Belgium and three other countries dismantled a drug trafficking network that shipped hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of cocaine into Western Europe.

The investigation, which started when a container with 2.8 tons of cocaine was found in Antwerp, uncovered an international network with connections in at least four European countries and South America.

Dutch police and prosecutors seized 28 firearms in the port city of Rotterdam. Earlier in the investigation, they intercepted thousands of kilograms (pounds) of cocaine, heroin and hashish, prosecutors said. □



In this Monday, March 23, 2020 file photo, shipping containers are offloaded in the Port of Antwerp, Belgium.

Associated Press

'Lula' convictions dismissed; could run again in Brazil

By **MAURICIO SAVARESE**
and **DAVID BILLER**
Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — A top judge has thrown out both corruption convictions of former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, opening the way for a possible battle against conservative incumbent Jair Bolsonaro in next year's elections.

Supreme Court Justice Luiz Edson Fachin on Monday annulled the convictions on procedural grounds, arguing the cases were tried in the wrong jurisdiction. That means the ruling may not affect numerous other convictions of powerful businessmen and politicians also swept up in the sprawling "Car Wash" investigations centered on the state-run oil giant Petrobras.

He said the case should be retried in the capital, though former prosecutor Deltan Dallagnol suggested on Twitter it may be too late for that because the statute of limitations for prosecution of the 75-year-old ex-leader could have expired.

The government can appeal Fachin's ruling to the full court and da Silva still faces other prosecutions in Brasília and Sao Paulo, though those are far from any final decision.



Former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva delivers a message to supporters and the media on July 13, 2017 at the headquarters of the Workers' Party in Sao Paulo.

Associated Press

Da Silva, universally known as "Lula," was wildly popular during his 2003-2010 presidency, when poverty fell as Brazil boomed, thanks in part to a commodities boom. He left office with an approval rating in the mid-80s. But his star dimmed in recent years as Brazil's economy slumped and corruption scandals involving the former leader and those around him gained traction.

Even so, he was leading in the polls for the 2018 presidential race before the

initial conviction ruled him out as a candidate. That opened the door for Bolsonaro, a right-wing lawmaker who won election with the image of an anti-corruption outsider.

Bolsonaro quickly responded to the court ruling, calling the administration of da Silva's Workers' Party "catastrophic. I think the Brazilian people don't even want a candidate like that in 2022, much less think about his possible election."

Analyst Thiago de Aragão, director of strategy at po-

litical consultancy Arko Advice, said the pugnacious Bolsonaro may benefit from a ruling that could help galvanize his hardcore backers, who see the Supreme Court as an enemy due to several rulings against the administration.

As news of the ruling broke, chants of "Lula livre!" — "Lula free!" — and recordings of jingles from his presidential campaigns echoed from windows in some cities. There were also cries of "Bolsonaro Out!"

Political consultant Thomas

Traumann, who worked in the administration of da Silva's protegee and successor, Dilma Rousseff, said the annulment of da Silva's conviction gives new life to the Workers' Party in which he remains the dominant figure.

He also projected that a polarizing campaign against Bolsonaro would make it tough for other rivals.

"These two will take a lot of room from any third-way candidate. They are two names with nationwide recognition, very clear projects, and allowing little space for any other bidders to thrive," Traumann said. "The election is only in October of next year, but it is fair to say that today kicks off a lot of the process."

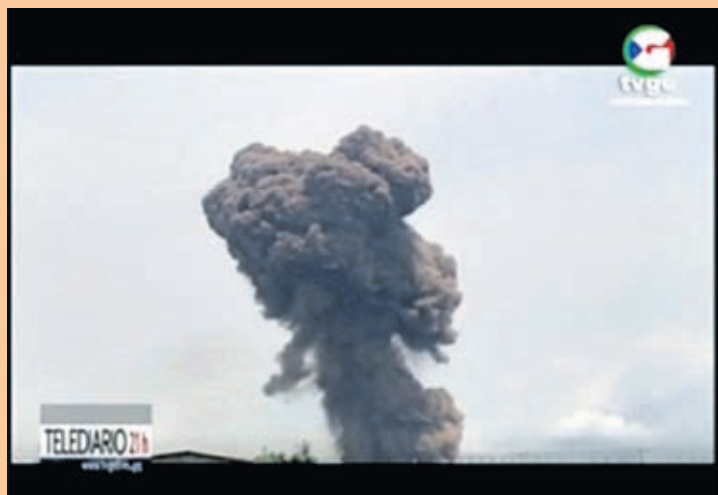
Da Silva was sentenced to 12 years and seven months for allegedly receiving an apartment worth about \$1 million as a bribe from construction company OAS. Da Silva has always denied ownership of the apartment. Another conviction involved his alleged ownership of a ranch in Atibaia, outside Sao Paulo.

Da Silva was released from prison in November 2019 due to a decision of the country's top court that a person can be imprisoned only after all appeals have been exhausted. □

Death toll from explosions in Equatorial Guinea rises to 98

By **CARLEY PETESCH**
Associated Press
DAKAR, Senegal (AP) —

The death toll from a series of explosions at a military barracks in Equatorial



This TVGE image made from video shows smoke rising over the blast site at a military barracks in Bata, Equatorial Guinea, Sunday, March 7, 2021.

Associated Press

Guinea rose by dozens to at least 98 killed after more bodies were recovered, the government said Tuesday. The blasts on Sunday in the Mondong Nkuan-toma neighborhood of the coastal city of Bata also wounded at least 615 people, authorities said. The government said that 316 of the injured have been discharged and 299 remain in care in various hospitals in the city.

More than 60 people were also rescued from under the rubble by the civil protection corps and fire service, the government said. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema said the govern-

ment will hold an emergency meeting to look into how victims can quickly receive aid from Equatorial Guinea before international aid arrives. Investigations into the blast have begun, he said in a Tuesday statement.

The president initially the explosion was due to the "negligent handling of dynamite" in the military barracks and the impact damaged almost all the homes and buildings in Bata. The vice president, who is also charged with defense and security, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, said Tuesday that investigations so far

showed the fire may have begun when a farmer set fire to his plot to prepare it for food production and a breeze spread the flames to the nearby barracks where the high-caliber ammunition was stored.

Images shown on state TV showed plumes of smoke rising above the explosion site as crowds fled. Roofs of houses were ripped off.

Equatorial Guinea, an oil-rich West African country of 1.3 million people located south of Cameroon, was a colony of Spain until it gained its independence in 1968. Bata has roughly 175,000 inhabitants. □

LOCAL



AHATA: February's occupancy was 70% lower than a year ago

ORANJESTAD — The Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association has published the latest hotel performance data reporting that in February 2021 Aruba hotels experienced a 27.9% occupancy rate.

JANUARY 2021:

- **Occupancy:** The occupancy rate was 27.9%, which is 68.8% lower than the occupancy a year ago.
- **ADR:** The average daily rate (for occupied rooms) decreased by 23.7% compared to last year, to \$294.63.
- **RevPAR:** The revenue per available room dropped by 76.2% to \$82.20.

OCCUPANCY FORECAST:

	Occupancy	Recovery vs 2019
March	35%	39%
April	43%	52%
Q2 2021	44%	54%
2021	46%	55%



TIMESHARE

AHATA's Timeshare properties experienced the same occupancy as the last 2 months, at a 58% rate, and project an average occupancy of 60% for March 2021.

AHATA member hotels: Amsterdam Manor Beach Resort, Barceló Aruba, Boardwalk Boutique Hotel, Brickell Bay Beach Club, Bucuti & Tara Beach

Resort, Courtyard by Marriott, Divi & Tamarijn All-Inclusive, Eagle Aruba Resort, Holiday Inn Resort Aruba, Hyatt Regency Aruba, Hyatt Place Aruba Airport, Manchebo Beach Resort, Marriott Aruba & Stellaris Casino, Paradera Park, Renaissance Aruba Resort, The Ritz-Carlton Aruba, RIU Palace Aruba, RIU Palace Antillas, Talk of the Town Hotel.

AHATA member timeshares: Divi Aruba Phoenix, Divi Dutch Village, Divi Village Golf, La Cabana, Marriott Ocean Club, Marriott Surf Club. □

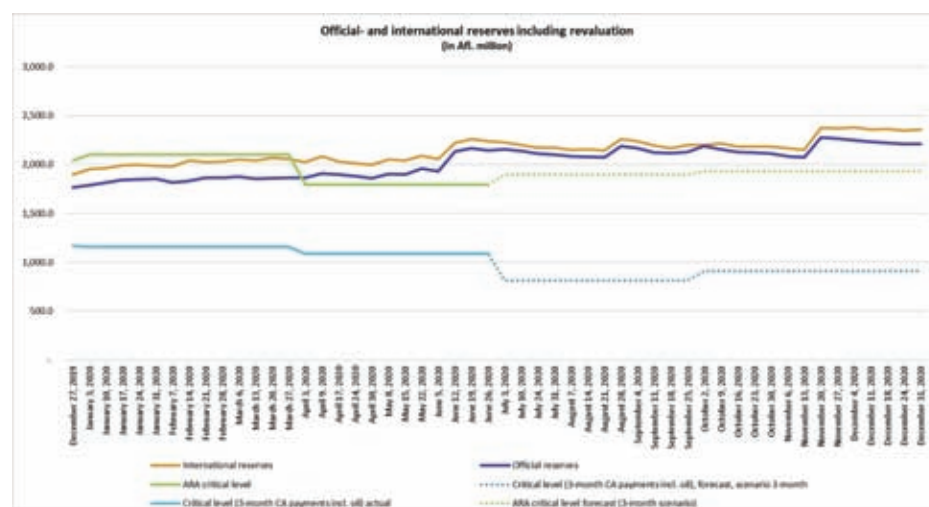
Level of international reserves strengthened during 2020

ORANJESTAD — During its meeting of January 28, 2021 and after reviewing the most recent economic and monetary data, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Centrale Bank van Aruba (CBA) decided to keep the reserve requirement at 7.0 percent. The reserve requirement refers to the minimum amount of reserves that commercial banks must hold at the CBA and is equal to 7.0 percent of their liabilities with a maturity less than 2 years. The following information and analysis were considered in reaching this decision.

International reserves

International reserves (including revaluation differences of gold and foreign exchange holdings), up to and including December 31, 2020, strengthened by Afl. 428.6 million compared to the end of December 2019. This expansion was the result of a sharp drop in imports due to reduced tourist and domestic demand, external financing received by the government, the foreign exchange measures taken by the CBA, and a revaluation of the gold holdings of the CBA following an increase in the market price of gold on the international market. Official reserves increased by Afl. 423.1 million. Consequently, the official and international reserves grew to, respectively, Afl. 2,207.9 million and Afl. 2,356.6 million as of the end of December 2020. Accordingly, the level of reserves remained adequate when benchmarked against the current account payments and the ARA metric by the IMF.

Figure 1: Reserves



Credit developments

In December 2020, total credit declined by Afl. 50.6 million or 1.3 percent, when compared to the end of 2019. This was mainly driven by the category 'other', which recorded a contraction of Afl. 59.2 million (-10.3 percent), as government bonds held by the commercial banks expired. Contrarily, the component 'loans to individuals' contributed positively to total credit (+Afl. 18.6 million/+1.0 percent), pushed up by housing mortgages. The category 'business loans' decreased by Afl. 10.1 million (-0.7 percent), the result of contractions in current account loans.

Inflation

The CPI was 2.7 percent lower in November 2020, compared to the corresponding month a year earlier (Figure 2). This was mainly attributed to lower prices for gasoline and a reduction in electricity tariffs. The 12-month average inflation rate reached -0.8 percent in November 2020, down from the peak of 4.3 percent reached in June 2019. When excluding energy and food, the 12-month average core inflation rate stood at 0.4 percent in November 2020.

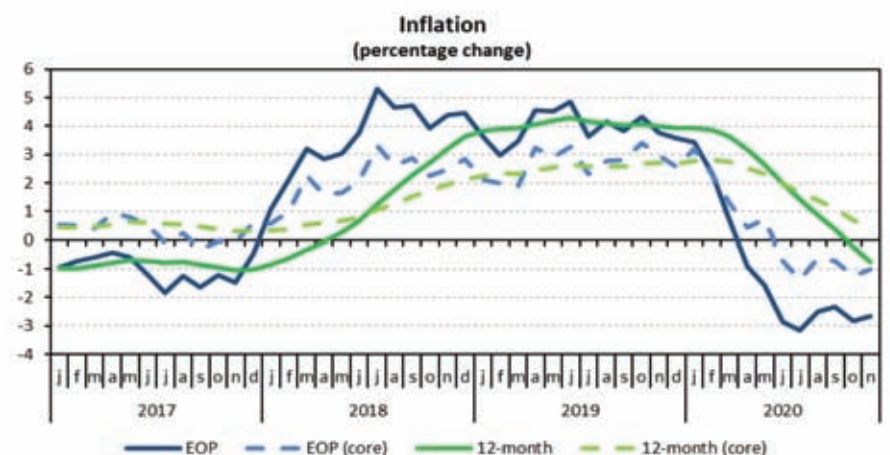


Figure 2: Inflation

Prudential liquidity

The prudential liquidity of commercial banks (33.0 percent), which measures the amount of their liquid assets to their total net assets, remained at a comfortable level in November 2020, far above the minimum required prudential liquidity ratio (15.0 percent). □

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Monuments of Aruba

ORANJESTAD — Since 1996, 'Stichting Monumentenfonds Aruba' (Monuments Fund Aruba) has primarily been involved in the funding of restoration and maintenance of protected monuments, and has been the financial institution in the field of heritage conservation. The fund owns 15 monuments, out of the 36 protected monuments in the island, but there are over 300 more monuments on the list to be protected. A well-known historical monument is the Bushiribana Goldmill.

Between 1814 to 1915 there were different companies looking for gold on Aruba. This ruin was built in 1872 at Bushiribana by the Aruba Island Gold Mining Company, with the help of masons from Curacao and Aruba. A very well-known Aruban mason of that time was Alexander Donati. A wooden crane

was built to help tilt the big heavy stones. The building served as a gold smelter from 1872 to 1899. Here were millions of pounds of gold processed during the gold rush of the nineteenth century in Aruba. After the Aruba Island Gold Mining Company left, came the gold smelter in the hands of other gold mining companies. A total of 200-300 miners worked here. There were several buildings in this area during that time including an administration office and houses for the miners. The last company that used this gold smelter was the Aruba Gold Concession Ltd. It left Bushiribana in 1899.

For more information check out their Facebook page stichting monumentenfonds aruba or their website <http://www.monumentenfondsaruba.com>.

Source: Monumentenfonds Aruba and Mr. Dufi Kock



Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

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Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received an extraordinary story from **Chris and Jay Little** from Atlanta. They wrote:



"Aruba to me is the people . There are so many faces and names we get to know while we visit Aruba every time and they all greet us with kindness and ability to offer an experience like none other." □

The Kitchen Table enters sixth year of gastronomic success on NEW location: A very fine culinary journey of Caribbean and Peruvian fusion cuisine

EAGLE BEACH — The Kitchen Table is an elegant, classy, intimate, high-quality restaurant with an exceptional dining set-up. Dining here is an experience, a kind of sitting- at your- best- friend's or family's kitchen table where you feel and taste that the food contains love. Are you looking for something different, an ecstatic foody trip, than this is where you need to go.

The 7-8 course gastronomic journey will start with sparkling wine at the patio of The Kitchen Table's new location at Paradise Beach Villas as of 6.45PM. Around 7.00PM guests will be guided for a memorable dinner on the second floor of the other popular restaurant Asi Es Mi Peru. The dining concept reflects extraordinary, elegant and exquisite dishes from the Caribbean, Peruvian fusion and international cuisine created by the owners, Chef David Lizano and his team. To pair the perfect wines three sommeliers were invited to make the selection. The interior of the restaurant is if you were in an elegant establishment in Lima, the capital city of Peru. You feel elevated in the top of the building where dinner takes place in an intimate setting. The typical, colorful Peruvian fabrics dress the ceiling while the large windows dignify the room. There are only 16 seats available creating an intimacy underlined by the owner's per-



sonal attention. "This is an amazing experience," says Robert J. Giordanella from New York. "The food is truly divine," shares a local guest. An evening at The Kitchen Table will be noted as unforgettable in your book of vacation memories, as it stands out from the regular island dinners.

It is all about consistency

The Peruvian-born Roxanna Salinas and her husband Jan van Nes are the secret formula behind The Kitchen Table's success. The couple takes a personal approach to what they do, this is not about running a business as usual. This is more about making you feel welcomed home, as well as being pampered. They bring top hospitality, experience and authenticity to the table. Within this gourmet dinner concept the two blended the Peruvian culinary art of Roxanna's top kitchen team and Jan's expertise from The



Kitchen Table. The result is one big trip of delight, indulge and tickling of your taste buds. The Kitchen Table welcomes you with open arms every Tuesday to Saturday.

Peruvian touch

In the last ten years, Peru has been

recognized as one of the world's best culinary destinations, and for seven consecutive years, the South American country has won the award for the Best Culinary destination at the Worlds Travel Awards. Biodiversity combined multiculturalism are the reasons why Peru is so rich in gastronomy. You can travel through the last 500 years, touch a mix of cultures whenever you taste authentic Peruvian cuisine. The Kitchen Table brings this epicurean delicacies to Aruba paired perfectly with the best wines and they will make you understand why Peru is at the height of today's gastronomy.

The Kitchen Table is open from Tuesday to Saturday. Have a peak on their website www.thekitchentableinaruba.com or call them at +297-280 7117. □



Microsoft server hack has victims hustling to stop intruders

By FRANK BAJAK, ERIC TUCKER and MATT O'BRIEN
Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Victims of a massive global hack of Microsoft email server software estimated in the tens of thousands by cybersecurity responders hustled Monday to shore up infected systems and try to diminish chances that intruders might steal data or hobble their networks.

The White House has called the hack an "active threat" and said senior national security officials were addressing it.

The breach was discovered in early January and attributed to Chinese cyber spies targeting U.S. policy think tanks. Then in late February, five days before Microsoft issued a patch on March 2, there was an explosion of infiltrations by other intruders, piggybacking on the initial breach. Victims run the spectrum of organizations that run email servers, from mom-and-pop retailers to law firms, municipal governments, healthcare providers and manufacturers.

While the hack doesn't pose the kind of national security threat as the more sophisticated SolarWinds campaign, which the Biden administration blames on Russian intelligence officers, it can be an existential threat for victims who didn't install the patch in time and now have hackers lingering in their systems. The hack poses a new challenge for the White House, which even as it prepares to respond to the SolarWinds breach, must now grapple with a formidable and very different threat from China. "I would say it's a serious economic security threat because so many small companies out there can literally have their business destroyed through a targeted ransomware attack," said Dmitri Alperovitch, former chief technical officer of the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike. He blames China for the global wave of infections that began Feb. 26, though other researchers say it's too early to confidently at-



In this Nov. 10, 2016, file photo, people walk past a Microsoft office in New York.

Associated Press

tribute them. It's a mystery how those hackers got wind of the initial breach because no one knew about this except a few researchers, Alperovitch said. After the patch was released, a third wave of infections began, a piling on that typically occurs in such cases because Microsoft dominates the software market and offers a single point of attack.

Cybersecurity analysts trying to pull together a complete picture of the hack said their analyses concur with the figure of 30,000 U.S. victims published Friday by cybersecurity blogger Brian Krebs. Alperovitch said about 250,000 global victims has been estimated. Microsoft has declined to say how many customers it believes are infected.

David Kennedy, CEO of cybersecurity firm TrustedSec, said hundreds of thousands of organizations could have been vulnerable to the hack.

"Anybody that had Exchange installed was potentially vulnerable," he said. "It's not every single one but it's a large percentage of them."

Katie Nickels, director of intelligence at the cyber-

security firm Red Canary, warned that installing patches won't be enough to protect those already infected. "If you patch today that is going to protect you going forward but if the adversaries are already in your system then you need to take care of that," she said.

A smaller number of organizations were targeted in the initial intrusion by hackers who grabbed data, stole credentials or explored inside networks and left backdoors at universities, defense contractors, law firms and infectious-disease research centers, researchers said. Among those Kennedy has been working with are manufacturers worried about intellectual property theft, hospitals, financial institutions and managed service providers who host multiple company networks.

"On the scale of one to 10, this is a 20," Kennedy said. "It was essentially a skeleton key to open up any company that had this Microsoft product installed." Asked for comment, the Chinese embassy in Washington pointed to remarks last week from Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang

Wenbin saying that China "firmly opposes and combats cyber attacks and cyber theft in all forms" and cautioning that attribution of cyberattacks should be based on evidence and not "groundless accusations."

The hack did not affect the cloud-based Microsoft 365 email and collaboration systems favored by Fortune 500 companies and other organizations that can afford quality security. That highlights what some in the industry lament as two computing classes the security "haves" and "have-nots."

Ben Read, director of analysis at Mandiant, said the cybersecurity firm has not seen anyone leverage the hack for financial gain, "but for folks out there who are affected time is of the essence in terms of patching this issue."

That is easier said than done for many victims. Many have skeleton IT staff and can't afford an emergency cybersecurity response — not to mention the complications of the pandemic.

Fixing the problem isn't as simple as clicking an update button on a com-

puter screen. It requires upgrading an organization's entire so-called "Active Directory," which catalogues email users and their respective privileges.

"Taking down your e-mail server is not something you do lightly," said Alperovitch, who chairs the nonprofit Silverado Policy Accelerator think tank.

Tony Cole of Attivo Networks said the huge number of potential victims creates a perfect "smoke-screen" for nation-state hackers to hide a much smaller list of intended targets by tying up already overstretched cybersecurity officials. "There's not enough incident response teams to handle all of this." Many experts were surprised and perplexed at how groups rushed to infect server installations just ahead of Microsoft's patch release. Kennedy, of TrustedSec, said it took Microsoft too long to get a patch out, though he does not think it should have notified people about it before the patch was ready.

Steven Adair of the cybersecurity firm Volexity, which alerted Microsoft to the initial intrusion, described a "mass, indiscriminate exploitation" that began the weekend before the patch was released and included groups from "many different countries, (including) criminal actors."

The Cybersecurity Infrastructure and Security Agency issued an urgent alert on the hack last Wednesday and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan tweeted about it Thursday evening.

But the White House has yet to announce any specific initiative for responding. □



Study: Chinook salmon are key to Northwest orcas all year

By **GENE JOHNSON**
SEATTLE (AP) — For more than a decade, Brad Hanson and other researchers have tailed the Pacific Northwest's endangered killer whales in a hard-sided inflatable boat, leaning over the edge with a standard pool skimmer to collect clues to their diet: bits of orca poop floating on the water, or fish scales sparkling just below the surface.

Their work established years ago that the whales depend heavily on depleted runs of Chinook, the largest and fattiest of Pacific salmon species, when they forage in the summer in the inland waters between Washington state and British Columbia.

But a new paper from Hanson and others at the NOAA Fisheries Northwest Fisheries Science Center provides the first real look at what the whales eat the



This Sept. 2008 photo provided by the Center for Whale Research taken near Washington state's San Juan Islands shows scientists looking for clues about the diet of the Pacific Northwest's endangered orcas using a pool skimmer to collect the scales or other remains of salmon the whales had eaten.

rest of the year, when they cruise the outer Pacific Coast data that reaffirms of Chinook to the whales and the importance of re-

covering Chinook populations to save the beloved mammals. By analyzing the DNA of orca feces as well as salmon scales and other remains after the whales have devoured the fish, the researchers demonstrated that the while the whales sometimes eat other species, including halibut, lingcod and steelhead, they depend most on Chinook. And they consumed the big salmon from a wide range of sources from those that spawn in California's Sacramento River all the way to the Taku River in northern British Columbia.

"Having the data in hand that they're taking fish from this huge swath of watershed across western North America was pretty amazing," Hanson, the study's lead researcher, said Wednesday.

"We have to have hard data on what these whales are actually doing." □

Associated Press

Heads up: Some sea slugs grow new bodies after decapitation

By **SETH BORENSTEIN and MAYUKO ONO**
Associated Press
TOKYO (AP) — Scientists have discovered the ultimate case of regeneration: Some decapitated sea slugs can regrow hearts and whole new bodies. This "wonder of nature," reported in a biology journal

on Monday, could eventually help scientists better understand and tackle regeneration of human tissue.

Biology researcher Sayaka Mitoh said she loves studying Japanese sea slugs because they are small, cute and weird. They can even briefly photosynthesize like

a plant drawing food from the sun.

One day in the lab, she saw something bizarre: A sea slug had decapitated itself and the head kept on moving and living. Then a couple more did the same, according to a study in Current Biology.

So the doctoral student and Nara Women's Uni-



This undated photo provided by Sayaka Mitoh shows a *Elysia cf. marginata* sea slug after autotomy.

Associated Press

versity aquatic ecology professor Yoichi Yusa tried it themselves, cutting the heads off 16 sea slugs. Six of the creatures started regeneration, with three succeeding and surviving. One of the three even lost and regrew its body twice. Two different species of Japanese sea slugs did this regeneration trick.

Other creatures can cast off body parts when needed, like when some lizards drop their tails to get away from a predator, in a biological phenomenon called autotomy.

"We think that this is the most extreme case of autotomy," Yusa said. □

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By Dave Green

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Assistant Director

Xiomara Arends

Editors

Liza Koolman (Management assistant)
Richard Brooks
Linda Reijnders

Sales

Linda Reijnders
(linda.reijnders@cspnv.com)
Sulaika Croes

Classifieds

classified@cspnv.com

Distribution and Collection

accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website

Juan Luis Pinto
Pilar Flores

Columnists

Anthony Croes
Joris Zantvoort
Thais Franken

Weststraat 22
T: 582-7800

E: news@arubatoday.com
W: www.arubatoday.com
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Malala takes her passions to the small screen with Apple

By **BROOKE LEFFERTS**

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Malala Yousafzai is a Nobel laureate known around the world for her activism, but she's also a cartoon fan, and is taking her love of television and film to Apple TV+.

Yousafzai, 23, who graduated from Oxford last June, announced Monday that she has partnered with Apple in a multi-year deal to develop dramas, documentaries, comedies, animation and series for kids. Yousafzai was the youngest winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, in 2014, for working to protect children from slavery, extremism and child labor. In her home country, Pakistan, she was outspoken in insisting that girls have a right to an education. She was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman while riding a school bus at age 15. She recovered and went on to fight against girls' oppression worldwide. In an interview with The Associated Press, Yousafzai talked about her love of cartoons as an escape, how she stays hopeful in



Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani Nobel Peace Prize winner, appears at the Cricket World Cup opening party along The Mall in London, on May 29, 2019.

Associated Press

a sometimes bleak world, and how she will mark Monday's International Women's Day.

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: Your new deal with Apple includes comedy and animated shows. Are you a comedy fan?

YOUSAFZAI: In my childhood, it was Cartoon Network and, you know, seeing "Tom and Jerry," "Courage," "Scooby Doo" and all of those TV cartoon shows. When you are a child and especially when terrorism started to know that there is sort of this world in cartoons

where you can escape from the reality around you and just giggle and laugh and just entertain yourself. You know, I have been watching comedy movies from Bollywood to Hollywood, and I am a big fan of animation as well. I have not missed a single animation movie. It just keeps you engaged and entertained and also gives you very beautiful messages.

AP: You'll also be developing documentaries and maybe covering your world travels to help girls?

YOUSAFZAI: I definitely want to do documentaries and non-scripted shows, and it will cover a lot hopefully my own journey as well and the incredible girls that I meet.... But there's so much more to explore and to learn. I'm excited. You know, I'm still at the stage where I'm exploring ideas. I can tell you that there are so many incredible ideas and it's so difficult to pick and choose one.

AP: A stat on your website suggests it will take 100 years until all girls have access to education. Sometimes the news is so dark, how do you

maintain hope?

YOUSAFZAI: I think when you raise your voice, it can have an impact and it can bring change. What will make me pessimistic is if we don't do anything. So as long as we keep doing our part, there is optimism, there is hope. I think it's just the silence that keeps things going as they are.

AP: How are you going to mark International Women's Day?

YOUSAFZAI: We need to just take a bit of a break and celebrate the accomplishments that women have made. And I'm not just talking about historical figures and activist women we need to applaud them and appreciate them. But us as individuals, who are in school, in colleges studying, or parents who are coping with COVID and being at home and managing their kids and also doing work and managing these Zoom calls and everything. So to all the women who just coped especially last year, you know take a break and be proud of yourself. You have done an incredible job. □

Piers Morgan quits talk show after comments about Meghan



In this Friday, Oct. 25, 2019 file photo, Piers Morgan arrives at the BAFTA Los Angeles Britannia Awards at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, Calif.

Associated Press

By **SYLVIA HUI**

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British talk show host Piers Morgan on Tuesday quit "Good Morning Britain" after making contentious comments about Meghan following her bombshell interview about the royal family. The U.K.'s media watch-

dog said earlier Tuesday that it was launching an investigation into the show under its harm and offense rules after receiving more than 41,000 complaints about Morgan's comments about the Duchess of Sussex.

Morgan's departure was announced shortly after

Buckingham Palace issued a statement saying allegations of racism made by Prince Harry and Meghan during an interview with Oprah Winfrey were "concerning."

In the interview, which aired in the U.S. on Sunday night and then in the U.K. on Monday evening, Meghan spoke about how she "didn't want to be alive anymore" as she struggled to fit in with the monarchy. She also alleged that she faced racist attitudes from Buckingham Palace and the U.K. media, and that her requests for help were rejected.

Morgan, 55, said Monday on "Good Morning Britain" during a discussion about Meghan's revelations that "I'm sorry, I don't believe a word she says."

"I wouldn't believe her if she read me a weather re-

port."

Morgan added she had sparked an "onslaught" against the royal family.

That drew criticism from many, including the mental health charity Mind, which said it was disappointed and concerned by Morgan's comments on not believing Meghan's experiences about having suicidal thoughts.

"It's vital that when people reach out for support or share their experiences of ill mental health that they are treated with dignity, respect and empathy," the charity said.

On Tuesday's episode, Morgan stormed off the set of the program as weather presenter Alex Beresford was criticizing his attitude toward Meghan. As Morgan walked away, he said "I'm done."

ITV, which produces

"Good Morning Britain," said Tuesday: "Following discussions with ITV, Piers Morgan has decided now is the time to leave 'Good Morning Britain.' ITV has accepted this decision and has nothing further to add."

Morgan was a former judge on "America's Got Talent," and in 2011 he replaced Larry King's prime-time slot on CNN with his own talk show, which was canceled in 2014 after poor ratings. He joined "Good Morning Britain" in 2015. □

7	5	4	3	8	9	6	1	2
1	9	2	5	7	6	3	8	4
8	6	3	2	4	1	5	7	9
6	8	5	4	9	3	7	2	1
2	7	1	6	5	8	4	9	3
3	4	9	1	2	7	8	5	6
5	2	6	7	1	4	9	3	8
9	3	7	8	6	2	1	4	5
4	1	8	9	3	5	2	6	7

Difficulty Level ★★

3/10

Analysis: A few days off are just what LeBron James needs

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
AP Basketball Writer

The Los Angeles Lakers don't resume their season until Friday, a day or two later than most clubs, and that was a very smart move by the NBA schedule-makers.

For the Lakers, and for the NBA, these few days are critical.

This is LeBron James' time to recharge.

Since the NBA's restart bubble that saved last season opened last July, no player has logged more minutes, scored more points, handed out more assists, made more shots, taken more shots or finished off more fast breaks than James.

He doesn't mind the workload, even though he's 36 and the fourth-oldest player to appear in a game so far this season behind only Miami's Andre Iguodala, Portland's Carmelo Anthony and New Orleans' JJ Redick. And he's still elite, still an MVP candidate, still in the eyes of many the best player in the world. But even the best need rest, and that time is now.

"Is it enough time? I'll take any time, obviously," James said. "So, I'll take full advantage of the time that we have. Is it enough time? No, it's never enough time, but we're not on the side of time. I'm not on the side of time. I'll take full advantage of what I have and be OK with it."

Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo is the two-time reigning MVP and now the reigning All-Star MVP, Washington's Bradley



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James smiles during the first half of basketball's NBA All-Star Game in Atlanta, Sunday, March 7, 2021.

Associated Press

Beal is leading the league in scoring, Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors are back in the playoff mix, the Utah Jazz have the league's best record to this point and the Brooklyn Nets have added Blake Griffin to their Big Three of Kevin Durant, James Harden and Kyrie Irving. They're all creating buzz. And so are others. But James is still unquestionably the one who carries the biggest part of the NBA flag. His jersey remains the most popular in terms of sales, the Lakers lead the league with 17 national television appearances to this point and they draw the best national ratings. People might watch be-

cause they love him. People might watch because they hate him. Either way, people watch.

Other players — even other elite players — do as well. "It's interesting to me how LeBron is still in one of the best shapes of his life and being the best player in the world and still be in Year 18," Antetokounmpo said. "That's really interesting. I want to know how."

He's not kidding. Antetokounmpo said at All-Star Sunday in Atlanta that he wants to pick James' brain and learn whatever the four-time MVP is willing to share. "He's been consistent for 18 years," Antetokounmpo said. "He's always

there. He's always showing up. He's unbelievable. He obviously gets credit but I think we've got to give him even more credit. Doing it for 18 years, guys, that's hard." There were any number of players who weren't thrilled with the notion that the NBA had an All-Star Game during a pandemic and during an already jam-packed season. But once again, it seemed all about James — as if he was the only one who voiced his displeasure.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver didn't mind. He was just thrilled James was part of All-Star events.

"It would be incredibly hypocritical of me to say

to LeBron that you should speak out on issues that are important to you, but not ones when you're critical of the league," Silver said. "We're all part of a community. I respect him and his point of view. Also, at the same time, I appreciate his professionalism. If you had a chance to see him, as captain and general manager of his team, proceed with the draft, he did it in good humor. He took it very seriously."

James went to Atlanta, played 12 minutes, checked out in the middle of the second quarter, became a cheerleader for the rest of the night and improved to 4-0 as a captain. His All-Star break, such as it is, started there. He flew home to Los Angeles after the game, said he was looking forward to a couple days with his family, and preparing for what comes next.

"There's no concern for me," James said. "I just try to continue to put my body in the best condition, to be able to endure anything, shortened offseason, shortened regular season, shortened All-Star break. It's all about my mind, personally. Keeping my mind mentally sharp, keeping my mind mentally fresh."

When the season restarts, James will be there. There's half a season left, then the playoffs and a title to defend. These days will be his last time to really exhale for a while.

The Lakers need him at his best. The NBA would benefit from that as well. □

Coco Gauff leads upsets in Dubai, top-seeded Svitolina loses

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — American teen Coco Gauff led a day of upsets in the second round of the Dubai Championships on Tuesday, when top-seeded Elina Svitolina lost and Petra Kvitova dropped out with a hip problem.

The 16-year-old Gauff fought back to defeat 12th-seeded Marketa Vondrousova 3-6, 6-0, 6-4 to set

up a third-round clash with Tereza Martincova, who upset the fifth-seeded Kiki Bertens 6-1, 6-4.

Svetlana Kuznetsova upset two-time champion Svitolina 2-6, 6-4, 6-1, completing her comeback win in just under two hours and will face Barbora Krejckova in the third round. The Czech defeated Jelena Ostapenko 6-3, 6-1.

Another teenager,

19-year-old Anastasia Potapova, defeated 11th-seeded Madison Keys 6-4, 6-3.

Kvitova, who defeated Garbiñe Muguruza to win the Qatar Open on Saturday, retired Tuesday with Jil Teichmann leading 6-2, 3-4. Kvitova said she's had an adductor problem since the semifinal in Doha.

French Open champion

Iga Swiatek eased past lucky loser Misaki Doi, 6-2, 6-4 for a third-round clash with Muguruza, who defeated American teenager Amanda Anisimova, 6-4, 6-2.

The second-seeded Karolina Pliskova had to dig hard for a 6-3, 6-7 (5), 6-2 win over Anastasija Sevastova and the sixth-seeded Belinda Bencic also had a tough match in beating

Veronika Kudermetova 6-4, 5-7, 6-4. Bencic needed five match points to seal her win.

Elise Mertens defeated Shelby Rogers 6-3, 6-3, but another American, Jessica Pegula, prevailed with a 6-1, 6-2 win over Kristina Mladenovic.

There were wins, too, for Caroline Garcia, Anett Kontaveit, Aryna Sabalenka, and Ons Jabeur. □

Cowboys, QB Prescott finally agree on \$160 million contract

By SCHUYLER DIXON
AP Pro Football Writer

The Dallas Cowboys and Dak Prescott have finally agreed on the richest contract in club history, two years after negotiations first started with the star quarterback.

The team said the agreement was reached Monday. It's a \$160 million, four-year contract with \$126 million guaranteed and an NFL-record \$66 million signing bonus, according to a person with knowledge of the deal who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because details weren't announced.

The deal comes a day before a deadline to put the franchise tag on Prescott for a second straight year at a salary cap charge of \$37.7 million. The new contract will lower that cap hit. Prescott played on a \$31.4 million franchise tag in 2020 before his season ended with a compound fracture and dislocation of his right ankle in Week 5.

At \$40 million per season, Prescott is second in the NFL in annual salary to Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes, who is at \$45 million annually in a \$450 million, 10-year deal that could eventu-



In this Oct. 11, 2020, file photo, Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott throws a pass in the first half of an NFL football game against the New York Giants in Arlington, Texas.

Associated Press

ally exceed \$500 million in value. Houston's Deshaun Watson is third at \$39 million annually.

The 27-year-old Prescott is the fourth Dallas player to get a \$100 million contract after Tony Romo, the injured quarterback he replaced and ultimately sent into retirement, and two teammates in defensive

end DeMarcus Lawrence and receiver Amari Cooper.

Lawrence was among plenty of teammates reacting to the news on social media, tweeting, "HE'S B A A A A A C C C C K K K K," while Prescott's brother, Tad, posted a photo of the two hugging after Prescott got the call about the deal.

Before the gruesome injury against the New York Giants in October, Prescott had started every game since the beginning of his rookie year after Romo injured his back during the 2016 preseason.

Prescott won NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year honors while leading the Cowboys to the No. 1 seed in the

NFC and two years later won his first playoff game while reaching his second Pro Bowl. Negotiations on a new contract started the following offseason, when Prescott was going into the final year of a four-year contract that paid him a total of about \$4 million as a fourth-round pick. That included \$2 million in the final season.

Prescott got a 1,500% raise with his first franchise tag, which locked in another increase for a second tag despite the salary cap going down because of the NFL's revenue dip in the pandemic.

With a new contract, the Cowboys will get salary cap relief they're expected to need with the cap falling from \$198 million to possibly as low as \$180 million. The cap has risen about \$10 million per season for most of the past decade.

Even before Prescott's injury, the Cowboys started slowly in coach Mike McCarthy's first season last year. But Prescott was still leading the NFL in yards passing for the league's No. 1 offense. Those numbers plummeted as Dallas lost its first four games without Prescott, falling to 2-7 on the way to a 6-10 finish. □

Springer, Bauer, Lindor lead list of big names on new teams



Toronto Blue Jays' George Springer races to third base on an infield ground ball during the first inning of a spring training baseball game against the Philadelphia Phillies, in Dunedin, Fla., Saturday, March 6, 2021.

Associated Press

By ROB MAADDI
AP Sports Writer

George Springer, Trevor

Bauer and Francisco Lindor are wearing blue now. Springer received the biggest contract in the offseason from the Toronto Blue Jays. Bauer got the most money per season from the Los Angeles Dodgers. Lindor was traded to the New York Mets in a six-player deal. The three star players headline the list of big names on new teams. Springer, a three-time All-Star outfielder and 2017 World Series MVP with Houston, signed a team-record \$150 million, six-year contract with the Blue Jays in January. He joined a roster that includes young sluggers Vladimir Guerrero and Bo Bichette, plus Cavan Biggio, Teoscar Hernandez and Lourdes Gurriel, Jr. "I

really like the blue. It's a good color," Springer said after his first spring training game with Toronto. "It was a little weird but I'm over it. It's fun and I enjoy it."

Bauer, who won the NL Cy Young Award last season with Cincinnati, signed a \$102 million, three-year deal with the Dodgers last month. The reigning World Series champions already had a pair of Cy Young Award winners in Clayton Kershaw and David Price. "This uniform is special," Bauer said in a two-minute video announcing his decision to sign with Los Angeles. "It's more than clothing. It's a lifestyle."

Lindor, a four-time All-Star shortstop in Cleveland, was traded along with right-hander Carlos

Carrasco to the Mets in January for young infielders Andrés Giménez and Amed Rosario, and two minor league prospects: right-hander Josh Wolf and outfielder Isaiah Greene. He arrived to spring training with his hair dyed blue, something he also did during his time with the Indians.

"You can see that I am all blued out," Lindor said. "Everything is blue in my life right now — blue and orange."

Here are five more well-known players in different places:

NOLAN ARENADO

The five-time All-Star third baseman was traded from Colorado to the St. Louis Cardinals for five players. Arenado, who won a Gold

Glove in each of his eight seasons with the Rockies, joined a team that reached the postseason seven times in the past 10 years. The Cardinals last won a World Series in 2011. Arenado hit .300 with a .937 OPS and averaged 40 homers and 124 RBIs between 2015-19. He led the league in homers three times in that span.

BLAKE SNELL

The 2018 AL Cy Young Award winner was traded from the Tampa Bay Rays to the San Diego Padres for four players in December. The left-hander left the mound with a 1-0 lead in the sixth inning of Game 6 of the World Series but the bullpen blew it and the Dodgers clinched the title with a 3-1 win. □